

Quizzing the expert: Samuel L. Katz on immunization

exceedingly high incidence of encephalitis or encephalopathy after getting primary smallpox vaccinations at age 18 or 19. The Dutch then switched to the W.H.O. strain of vaccine, and these complications fell off dramatically. Apparently, the strain of vaccine virus used before by the Dutch had neurotropic characteristics not present in the strains used by most other nations.

There's one question on smallpox that I get at least one letter a week about: People ask me if some nation couldn't capitalize on the discontinuation of routine vaccination by using smallpox as a biological warfare weapon. Well, I feel that if someone wants to destroy the world, smallpox virus isn't the weapon he'll pick. □

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Memo from
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To: Dr SL Katz
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see

① Has anyone made that point in print?

② Is your reply a considered one? Or that you don't think such considerations should influence our public health policy? (with which I would agree)

Wouldn't smallpox in fact make a rather reasonable harassing and or clandestine weapon? (In a world that has seen massacres at Lod airport and a Khartoum embassy!) In fact I'm sorry you even articulated the idea in print in what might be an instructive fashion. I've had plenty of self-doubts on the same score.

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